

Editoriale

Free Will, Compatibilism, and Incompatibilism. A Dialogue with Daniel Dennett

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I am very grateful to Daniel Dennett for granting us permission to publish his review of Sam Harris' book *Free Will*, already available online, in this volume of the *Rivista internazionale di Filosofia e Psicologia*.

This text deserves to be presented to our readership as an autonomous essay, independently of Harris' reply, first of all because it offers a clear and concise summary of the kernel of Dennett's compatibilist view on the relationship between free will and determinism. (Of course, if Harris would be willing to send us a further reply to this essay, we would be glad and honored to publish it in one of the next volumes.) Secondly, this reissue of Dennett's paper gave us the opportunity to ask other scholars for comment. In fact, Dennett's review is followed by four comments authored by Mario De Caro, Andrea Lavazza, John Lemos and Derk Pereboom who are well known for having published, among others, major works on free will. On behalf of the editorial board of the Journal, I would like to express our gratitude and appreciation to these scholars. Finally, Dennett re-

plied to their comments in a short but dense final note. For this, we thank him once again.

The review together with the comments offers a concise and precise overview of the various solutions developed by philosophers – also in response to recent developments in neuroscience – to the issue of whether the existence of free will, as the ground for moral and juridical responsibility, is compatible with a scientific world-view. In particular, the question they address is whether free will is compatible with the hypothesis that all events – including our voluntary actions – happen in accordance with the strictly deterministic laws of nature.

Among the incompatibilists, the libertarians argue for the existence of free will and deny that the laws of nature determine all events, including what we decide to do based on our own free will. The hard determinists (or illusionists) think, on the contrary, that the laws of nature determine everything that happens and that therefore free will is an illusion. For their part, the compatibilists go back to Hume's concept of "liberty of spon-

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taneity” and believe that the existence of free will is compatible with universal determinism: even though determinism is true, human beings act freely when their actions are not determined by external causes, but by their own decisions, which depend in turn on their personality (and thus, ultimately, on the activity of their brain which is shaped by their genetic heritage and by all their past experiences).

Following other well-known essays he has written on the topic, in his review and reply Dennett again raises his compatibilist stance in an original form. He maintains that libertarians and hard determinists fall into a common mistake of Cartesian origin which consists in believing that we act freely only if it is not our brain that makes us do what we do. To both he raises the objection that: «[if you say] “my brain made me do it!” Well of course it did, but it is not something external

to *you*, but rather a part of *you*».

The commentators take different stands on this issue. Mario De Caro shares the very same perspective as Dennett; Andrea Lavazza argues for a view that is, in part, similar to Dennett’s; John Lemos defends a libertarian position; in contrast, Derk Pereboom distances himself from Dennett and argues for a thesis that – standing in opposition to both compatibilism and libertarianism – is inclined towards hard determinism. Thus, taken together these works cover quite well all the options in play in the debate on whether free will is or is not compatible with determinism. Of course, as becomes clear looking at the large bibliography Dennett and his commentators refer to, the philosophical and scientific debate on free will is wide-ranging and these pages cannot account for the full range of positions. However, they will certainly stimulate reflection and further reading.